

# COMMON STRESS REACTIONS FOLLOWING EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA

## Psychological and Emotional

- Initial euphoria, relief
- Guilt about surviving or not having suffered as much as others
- Anxiety, fear, insecurity, worry
- Pervasive concern about well-being of loved ones
- Feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, being overwhelmed
- Vulnerability
- Loss of sense of power, control, well-being, self-confidence, trust
- Shame, anger over vulnerability
- Irritability, restlessness, hyperexcitability, impatience, agitation, anger, blaming (anger at source, anger at those exempted, anger at those trying to help, anger “for no apparent reason”)
- Outrage, resentment
- Frustration
- Cynicism, negativity
- Mood swings
- Despair, grief, sadness
- Periods of crying, emotional “attacks” or “pangs”
- Feelings of emptiness, loss, hopelessness, depression
- Regression
- Reawakening of past trauma, painful experiences
- Apathy, diminished interest in usual activities
- Feelings of isolation, detachment, estrangement, “no one else can understand”
- Denial or constriction of feelings; numbness
- “Flashbacks,” intrusive memories of the event, illusions, pseudo-hallucinations
- Recurrent dreams of the event or other traumas

## Cognitive

- Poor concentration
- Mental confusion, slowness of thinking
- Forgetfulness
- Amnesia (complete or partial)
- Inability to make judgments and decisions
- Inability to appreciate importance or meaning of stimuli
- Poor judgment
- Loss of appropriate sense of reality (denial of reality, fantasies to counteract reality)
- Preoccupation with the event
- Repetitive, obsessive thoughts and ruminations
- Over-generalization, over-association with the event
- Loss of objectivity
- Rigidity
- Confusion regarding religious beliefs/value systems; breakdown of meaning and faith
- Self-criticism over things done/not done during trauma
- Awareness of own and loved ones' mortality